

At the **Department of Veterans Affairs**, the nearly \$113 billion FY 2010 budget request represents a 15% increase over FY 2009 and is the largest one year percentage increase for the VA requested by a President in over 30 years. On September 30, 2008, there were an estimated 23.3 million Veterans living in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Of these, the VA currently estimates there are 131,000 homeless Veterans on any given night. The President's proposed FY 2010 budget includes \$500 million for VA targeted homeless assistance programs. The VA is forming partnerships with other Federal agencies, community coalitions, and faith-based organizations to participate in a coordinated approach in delivering services to homeless Veterans and those at the greatest risk of homelessness. The Department also expects to spend more than \$2.7 billion providing health care treatment to homeless Veterans.

The President's budget includes a new \$26 million pilot program with non profits to help maintain stable housing for vulnerable Veterans and their families while the VA provides needed support services. As authorized in the Veterans' Mental Health and Other Care Improvement Act of 2008, Public Law 110-387, the VA also plans to begin implementation of supportive services for low-income Veterans living in permanent housing. VA will provide grants to community and faith-based agencies to assist low-income Veterans and their families by providing case management and other supportive services to help prevent the onset of homelessness. VA will develop program regulations and guidance in 2009 and award grants for the program in 2010.

Funding for the Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem program, through which the VA assists community-based organizations to create and sustain transitional housing and service programs for homeless Veterans, would be increased to \$144 million. Both grants and per diem funding would be available and the VA would continue to fund community-based organizations that offer services for special needs populations including the chronic mentally ill, elderly, terminally ill, and homeless women Veterans, including women Veterans with children.

As the number of women Veterans increases, the VA has increased funding dedicated to meeting their special needs. Full-time Women Veterans Program Managers are now in place at all VA medical facilities. These program managers are advisors to, and advocates for, women Veterans to help ensure their care is provided with the appropriate level of privacy and sensitivity. Increasing access to medical care in rural areas is also a targeted area of funding. The VA budget includes \$440 million for rural health initiatives to increase access and improve care including mobile clinics, new outpatient clinics, expanding fee-basis care, operating Rural Health Resource Centers, accelerating telemedicine deployment, and exploring collaborations with other federal and community providers.

The VA plans to continue working closely with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development in the implementation of the HUD-VASH program. The primary goal of HUD-VASH is to move Veterans and their families out of homelessness and into permanent housing. This collaborative effort is supported through HUD Section 8 "Housing Choice" rental assistance vouchers and VA's provision of intensive case management services. The budget includes \$83 million to continue the Health Care for Homeless Veterans program through which outreach teams work closely with community agencies and homeless Veterans throughout the country, assisting nearly 66,000 Veterans in 2007. VA will also continue its incarcerated Veteran prison re-entry initiative designed to prevent homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness, and

criminal recidivism begun in 2007. Healthcare for Re-Entry Veterans (HCRV) Specialists help re-entry Veterans make a successful transition from prison to the community by engaging correctional, VA and community resources to make available housing, employment, mental health and other social services.

The budget proposal for the VA also places a high priority on initiatives aimed at making servicemembers' transition to civilian life and VA benefits seamless, so important to overall efforts to reduce the incidences of new Veterans becoming homeless.